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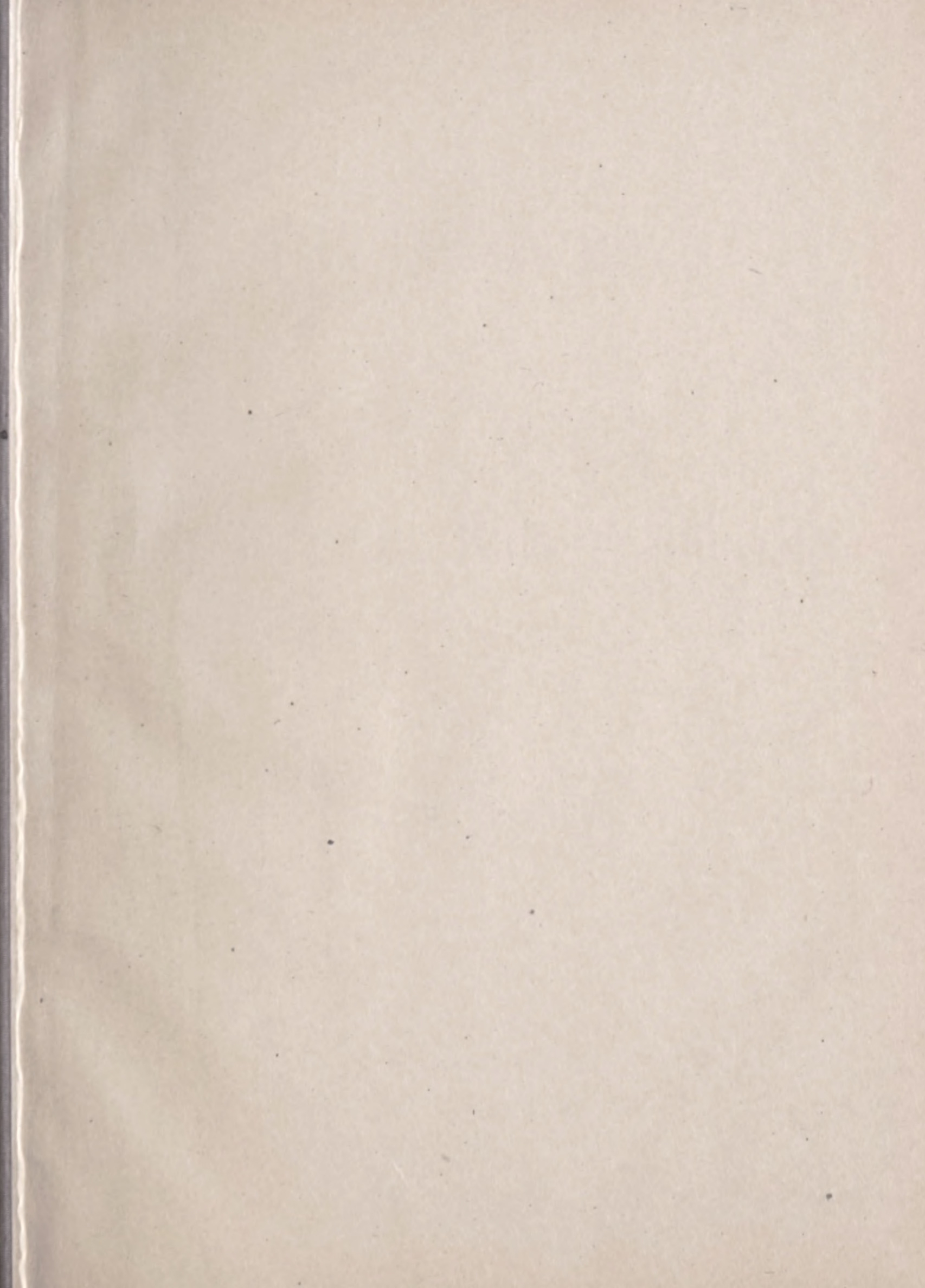


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THE BOGGS BOYS

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Corralling the Kids of Kiddville.

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A. W. ✓ CONNER.

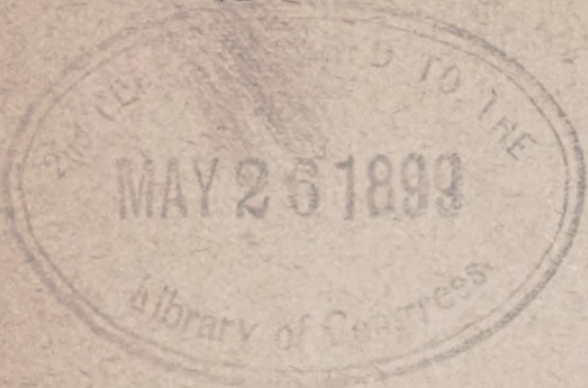
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DEDICATION.

Having passed through the "stress period" of life—not without irreparable losses; having, 'midst mirth and tears, learned the power of a Princely Boyhood,

I Dedicate This Little Book

TO

THE MEN OF AMERICA,

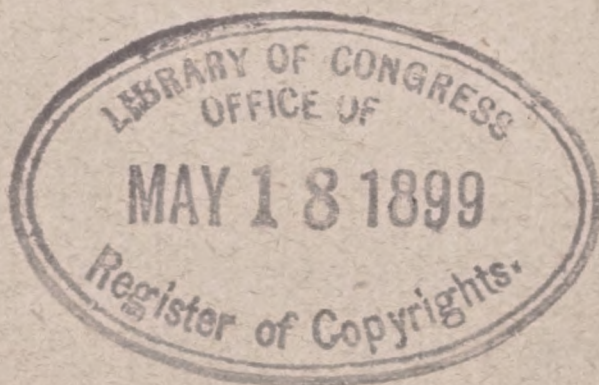
Who, armed out of the experience of the past, should sally forth as "Twentieth Century Knights" and defend imperiled boyhood of to-day. For in "Columbia's land"

"EVERY BOY IS A PRINCE."

AUTHOR.

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Press of the Reporter Publishing Co., Indianapolis

22556 Mar. 29.99.

THE BOGGS BOYS,
OR
CORRALLING THE KIDS OF KIDDVILLE.

CHAPTER I.

CALVIN ATWOOD'S CALL.



MY CALL to the Kiddville Church was peculiar in one respect—I was not asked to preach a trial sermon. After some correspondence I was surprised to receive the following telegram:

“Kiddville, Ind., March 1, 18..

Calvin Atwood:

We extend unanimous call. Salary eight hundred dollars. Begin April first.

Timothy Bentley, Clerk.”

I was then a young man of twenty-three years; the happy possessor of a wife and a black-eyed baby girl of eighteen months. I had been dividing my time between preaching and teaching. My household possessions were not numerous. My library was largely composed of text-books. My bank ac-

count was very small, much smaller than my stock of sermons, and that was scarcely worth naming, so I felt that moving from Illinois to Indiana would be a very light task. With an offer of eight hundred dollars as the salary I felt that there was no doubt but that it was the will of the Lord that I should accept this call. The next day I sent the following message:

“.....ville, Ill., March 2, 18..

Timothy Bentley, Kiddville, Ind.:

Call accepted. Will arrive with family March twenty-seventh. Calvin Atwood.”

No sooner had I sent this message than I began to have many misgivings as to the wisdom of my decision. Personally I knew nothing of the church, never having seen a single member of it. I had learned that their former pastor was a highly educated gentleman of long experience. I was young and inexperienced, and worse than all this, I was far from being prepossessing in personal appearance. To my great annoyance, I could not support a moustache, and clerical clothes made me the laughing stock of strangers. In their eyes I was only a boy. My wife, however, dispelled all my fears, and assured me that I would soon win the hearts of the boys of the community, and that that would make me master of the situation.

The deacon in one of his letters had stated that the church felt the need of a young pastor who could win and hold the boys and the young men. It was this prospect that had turned my heart to Kiddville.

At 9 o'clock on the morning of March 27 wife, baby Grace and I got off the train at the town of Racketsburgh, the nearest railway station to Kiddville. Half an hour later, in a public hack, in company with a half dozen passengers, we were on our way to Kiddville, which was twelve miles distant. The country was beautiful and the ride not unpleasant. The driver and passengers engaged in lively gossip of no interest whatever to wife and me, until a red-whiskered passenger said:

"Say, Ol, I thought the new preacher was comin' to-day!"

"Deacon Bentley was lookin' for him," said the driver. "I was at both trains, but no preacher got off that I saw." My wife gave me a nudge with her elbow that almost took my breath. "Deacon's folks will be fearfully put out, they're lookin' for him for dinner."

"I've been lookin' for them to get fooled, anyhow," said an old lady who sat by the red-whiskered man. "This hirein' a preacher 'thout seein' or hearin' him's like buyin' a pig in a poke. I was 'ginst it."

"Oh! I don't know about that," said a business-looking gentleman, who appeared to be a stranger to the other passengers. "I should think it would be the best way to employ a pastor, especially if you were well informed as to his character and work."

"Be you the new preacher?" asked the old lady, somewhat bewildered. "Indeed I am not," said the gentleman, smiling.

"Thought not," said the red-whiskered man. "I heard he

is a young man. Hirin' a youngster for Kiddville's desperate risky."

"I heerd 'em say," put in another passenger, "that he's a power on gettin' hold of boys and young men; if he is, I'm glad he's comin' if he can't preach a bit."

"He'll have to be a fifty hoss-power if he gits hold of the Boggs boys," said red whiskers.

"He must get them before he can do any good for the others," interposed a young gentleman.

"That's a gospel truth!" said the driver. "I'll bet the new preacher's business. His goods have come and are in the parsonage. Bob Junkins hauled them out last Saturday."

By 12 o'clock we reached the north edge of Kiddville. Here the red-whiskered man left us. Further down the street we stopped in front of a neat residence, and the driver, addressing a gentleman standing at the gate, said: "I'm sorry to disappoint you, Deacon, but there didn't nobody git off of the train that looked like he could preach any more than I can—"

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "but is not this Brother Timothy Bently? My name is Calvin Atwood."

The driver gave a gasp, and the passengers opened their eyes in amazement.

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed the driver. "I was wonderin' all the way out who you folks was. Just as usual, I've made a fool of myself by tryin' to say somethin' smart."

"Most of folks do that," said the deacon.

The deacon and his family were very kind to us. By

Friday noon we were very comfortably located in the parsonage. The next day we spent in resting, preparatory to the introduction to our work.

Lord's day dawned bright and beautiful. As the hour for meeting drew near people from the country began to arrive. The parsonage and church were located on the east side of the village. The parsonage was on the north side of the street, and the church building stood on the south side, facing the parsonage. The church stood in an open space, and hitching racks were on all sides. Back of the church was a burying ground. The church lot and cemetery had once been a part of the beautiful and fertile farm laying to the south and east. The adjoining field was a blue grass pasture. This farm, I learned, belonged to Mr. Joseph Boggs, who had never become reconciled to the church occupying a part of his farm.

Before I crossed over to the church, the hitching racks were well filled and many friends were greeting each other in the church yard. I felt highly complimented over the prospect of a large audience. When I passed into the building I was greatly pleased. The ladies and gentlemen were all well dressed, and gave evidence of being a very social, kind-hearted and intelligent people. There was one thing that attracted my attention, and that was the absence of boys and young men. In the short time I had been in the town I had noticed a large number of boys from thirteen to eighteen years of age. Now, facing this audience, I could

only count five boys of that age, and not a larger number of young men, ranging from eighteen to twenty-two years.

I chose as the text of my introductory sermon those wonderful words of Paul: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." My auditors proved to be excellent listeners. As I was describing the superiority of this knowledge over all other an impressive silence fell upon the assembly. This silence became akin to awe, as I spoke of the duty of seniors to impart this knowledge to the young and rising generation. Suddenly there came a low, rumbling sound, like distant thunder. It drew nearer, and the house appeared to tremble as if the earth was quaking. Faces gave expression of fear. I looked to the pasture through the window at my right and saw a herd of cattle and horses stampeding towards the church. The noise became more alarming; horses at the racks became frightened, and a number of men who sat near the open windows sprang out, which thus added to the excitement of the audience. Then 'midst the lowing of cattle and snorting of horses there came a fearful crash, caused by breaking timbers, which was followed by a heavy stroke against the building. Then I detected screams, as if some one was in most intense pain. Within the building women were screaming, without the bellowing of cattle and the shouting of men were increasing. Seeing that my efforts to quiet the people were useless, I rushed out of the house. At the rear of the church, where the cemetery fence joined the pasture fence, was a crowd of excited men, while in the pasture was a herd

of cattle equally excited. I found it, at first, impossible to enter the crowd or to discover the cause of the disturbance.

"What is the trouble?" I asked Deacon Bently, who happened to be at my side.

"I don't know what the trouble is," he said, "but I bet the Boggs boys are at the bottom of it."



CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS ACCIDENT.



IN THE midst of the noise and excitement I was startled by a voice calling out, "Help, men! Release that boy!" It was the voice of Mrs. Atwood. How she got into that crowd, I could not imagine. I was seized with fear, and instantly forced my way to her.

There upon the ground were two calves entangled in their yoke and in the wreck of the fence and hitch rack. They were rolling their eyes and bawling pitiously. Under the wreck of an old sled and some boards, was a boy struggling for liberty. My wife, kneeling, held the head of another boy whose face was deathly pale, whose hands and feet were bound with cords, and above his right eye was a gastly wound, from which the blood flowed rapidly. My wife was trying to stay this flow of blood. Her hands and dress were blood stained.

"Wife!" I exclaimed, excitedly, "how came you here?"

"This is no time to ask questions, Calvin. Call a physician."

"Where is baby Grace?" I asked, giving no heed to her command.

"You selfish creature!" she said reprovingly, "help me get this boy into the parsonage."

Two young men took the boy up, and my wife arose, and, facing the crowd, said, "Stand back, men, and let us pass to the parsonage." By this time the other boy extricated himself from the tangle and disappeared. I now observed that not less than forty or fifty boys had forced themselves into this crowd. Dr. Quick seized me by the arm and said: "Parson, you had better follow your wife and prevent the people entering your gate. They will jam the house so full you can't breathe."

I rushed forward, the doctor following me. I reached the gate just as wife and her assistants were entering with the unconscious boy.

"Kind friends," I said, closing the gate as the doctor entered, "the injured boy is now in the hands of his physician and friends, and you had all better pass away from the house, lest the noise and excitement harm him."

"Whose boy is he?" asked a half dozen at once.

"I do not know," I replied.

"It's Shortie Boggs," said one man.

"No its not," said another crossly. "I didn't see him, but you'll never see a Boggs boy get the sense knocked out of 'im."

"Got none to knock out," said a man seeking to enter the gate. "Parson, you will find out after a while the kind of a place you've gotten into. There is not a meaner set of youngsters in all creation than you'll find in Kiddville."

Just then the door opened, and the doctor addressing an elderly man standing near the gate, said: "Brother Summers, I have bad news for you. It is George we have in here. I fear he is fatally injured."

"George! Not my boy!" exclaimed Mr. Summers. He turned pale and staggered as though he would fall. I took hold of him and assisted him in entering the room, where the doctor said in a comforting way:

"Brother Summers, you must be heroic. How badly your boy is hurt I cannot tell. I want that you and the preacher shall see him just as he was found and carried in. You are an old man, and have seen too much of the troubles of life to be overcome by this accident."

"George is my only child, the son of my old age."

"I know," said the doctor kindly. "The greater need of Christian fortitude. His mother has not seen him yet."

While the doctor was talking, the father became more quiet and self-possessed. Then the doctor led him into another room, where the boy was lying on a bed. My wife was untying the cord about his hands, and the young men were loosening the cords binding the boy's feet.

The father came near the boy, bent his trembling form over him, placed his gray bearded face against that of the unconscious boy and sobbed, "Oh! my boy, my prince! Gladly would I have died for you!"

"How that father loved his boy!" said my wife to one of the young men standing by.

"Oh, yes!" replied the young man heartlessly. "They all

love them when they are sick or get the life knocked out of them all at once. I would like to see some of this love shown to the live and healthy boy. Oh, that's straight goods, Mr. Preacher," said the young man, looking me in the face. "I know what I'm talking about. Two years ago, when my team ran away with a reaper and nearly killed me, my father took on fearfully over me, and as long as they thought I was going to die every man in the town was wanting to do something for me. But when I got well father blamed me for letting the horses get away, and the people lied about me. They said I was drunk, and Deacon Bentley caught on to this report and wanted to turn me out of church. Maybe they did for all I know, I have never been back since."

"There now, Frank, you are saying too much," said the other young man. "You know Father Summers loves boys. He always took your part, and kept them from turning you out of church."

"Oh! yes, that is so," said the first speaker. "I don't doubt but he loves George. He is the only man in this county that ought to have a boy."

"Oh, doctor!" said the father imploringly, "save my boy!"

"I will if I can. Now, Father Summers, let me insist upon your becoming more calm and self-possessed. It is very important that George shall not be excited when he returns to consciousness. Do you feel strong enough to inform your wife of this accident? It would be better for the boy if she could see him before he gains a knowledge of his condition. Besides, I think it best to take George home now.

You go to your home and prepare your wife for our coming, and I will see that George is gotten home in the best possible manner."

The old man departed for home, attended by Deacon Bently, who, with his wife, had come into the parsonage, bringing baby Grace with them.

There was much talk during the preparation for moving the boy. My wife had provided that her assistants and Brother Bentley should return to the parsonage for dinner. The people were saying all manner of things about the cause of the accident.

An hour later the two young men returned with Deacon Bentley; and I noticed a very marked air of unfriendliness between the young men and the church official. It was only the persuasion of Mrs. Bentley and my wife that secured the presence of the young men at dinner. Of course, there was only one topic of conversation.

"Brother Atwood," said the deacon, "this has been an exciting introduction for you. You can now have some idea of what a dreadful class of boys and young men we have in this community. It is just as I wrote you. Something must be done, or they will all go to the devil. The best we can do will not reach some of the older ones. Their case is hopeless," and he cast a suggestive glance from his cold gray eyes at one of the young men. That glance was fully understood by the young man, for he said sharply:

"The men who are church members are as much to blame for the condition of things as the boys."

"I believe you are about right," said Mrs. Bentley.

This remark drew from the deacon a facial expression of a gathering storm, and I, thinking to prevent an outburst of temper, said: "Wife, there is one thing I would like for you to explain. How did you manage to get to the boys so soon?"

"That is easily explained," she said. "I was sitting near a window, and while you were speaking Grace became restless. I thought to quiet her by showing her things outside. When I looked towards the Boggs home I saw a number of boys running around the barn. Then suddenly two calves hitched to a sled came running from behind the barn, dashed through a gate and into the field. On the sled were two boys, and one appeared to be working with the other. It was but a moment till all the cattle and horses in the field stampeded. I saw they would run into the fence, so I gave baby Grace to Sister Bentley, and I stepped out of the door about the time the men began to jump out of the window. I reached the boys just in time to see George's head strike the hitch rack post. The other boy was trying to save George. How did George come to be tied, do you suppose?"

"That is to be accounted for as is all the rest of the meanness of this community. The Boggs boys are at the bottom of the whole thing," growled the deacon.

"It is easy enough to accuse them," said the young man, who appeared to have the greatest dislike for the deacon.

"But there are worse boys than the Boggs boys, and some of them are sons of church officers. I have seen Paul up to tricks the Boggs boys would not stoop to."

Again the storm clouds gathered in the deacon's face. Paul was the deacon's fifteen-year-old son. "I suppose," I said, in-

interrupting the speaker, "that the other boy could explain this whole mystery. Do any of you know who he was?"

"I thought," said one of the young men, "that it was Bill Featherweight. I was busy helping Mrs. Atwood, and did not get a good look at him."

"That's who he was," said the other young man, "and you will have a hard time getting the truth out of him if the Boggs boys get to see him before any one else does, especially if they had anything to do with this accident."

"Brother Atwood," said a messenger, "they want you down at Mr. Summers's. They think George is dying."



CHAPTER III.

CALLED TO BE A COWBOY.



LEAVING baby Grace and the parsonage in the care of Deacon Bentley, Mrs. Atwood and I, without delay, went to the house of Brother Summers. A more exciting scene I had never witnessed. The neighbors were running in and out of the house to such an extent that the doctor was angry. As I came near him a woman rushed up to him and said:

"Can't you save him, doctor?"

"Save him!" said the doctor, "the Almighty could not save him with such a mob as this around. What can I do with a lot of crazy women running all over me?" Then turning to me with a frown, he asked: "Did your wife come?"

"She did, but I will see that she leaves at once."

"No!" he said gruffly, "I don't want her to leave. I sent for her instead of you."

A feeling of pride for my wife, accompanied with a deep sense of my own inferiority, swept over me. I must have shown the same in my face, for the doctor gave me a sharp glance out of his jet black eyes as he said: "We need skillful nursing here instead of loud praying." Then, addressing my wife, who at that moment had pressed her way to us, he

said: "Mrs. Atwood, I wish you to remain, but I am going to put the rest of these people out of the house."

Then, lifting his voice so all could hear, he said:

"People, if you don't get quiet you will kill this old man and his wife as well as their boy. I want every one of you to leave this house at once. If you are needed you will be sent for. Parson, take these people into the woods and hold a prayer meeting with them. The farther away the better!"

The people left the house, some of them very angry. To tell the truth, I felt that the doctor had done me a personal injury. But, under the circumstances, there was nothing for me to do but to accompany the people. I knew I was not wanted or I should have been asked to remain. Besides, I was a stranger, and such treatment was likely to depreciate my official standing before the people. I was very sure I had made a poor impression upon the leading physician of the town. He evidently looked upon me as only a boy. Just as I had expected, my personal appearance had given the doctor license to treat me as a child—in one word, to drive me away from a house into which I supposed I had been called for the purpose of giving spiritual advice and comfort. On the street their inquiring gaze added to my confusion, especially when I overheard one of them remark, "Old Doc fired the young preacher along with the rest of them."

There was only one comforting thing about the whole affair—Mrs. Atwood was occupying a position where she was likely to become the mistress of the situation. She had won the confidence and respect of the doctor. This, however, was no surprise to me. I knew she never failed to be equal to any

and every emergency. This I was fully prepared for; but I was not prepared for the indifferent, matter-of-fact way in which she had seen me pushed aside and herself called into a most important service. What I dreaded, above everything else in life, was that people should fall into the habit of speaking of Mrs. Calvin Atwood and her husband, instead of Rev. Atwood and wife. I had met a few such cases in life, and to me they were most pitiable.

The more I thought on this point the more I was annoyed. My wife could easily have spoken to the doctor and requested that I should be retained in the house. In this case he could have done nothing else but keep me, and I should have appeared useful instead of useless in the eyes of the people. My mind continued to run along this line till, seeking some source of comfort, there came suddenly the thought, "At the funeral I can regain my lost position."

"What!" I said, "has it come to this!" For I had a habit of speaking to myself when deep in thought. "Calvin Atwood! Think where you are! Have you come to a point where you are jealous of your wife's usefulness? Are you wanting a boy to die, that at his funeral you may show your oratorical powers?" I stopped and looked about, lest some one had heard me speak.

A few steps more and I was standing at the parsonage gate. Deacon Bentley and his wife took my description of Dr. Quick's behavior very coolly. They were of the opinion that people had taken no offense at his words. Baby Grace being asleep, the deacon and his wife soon left.

When alone I tried to make a thorough survey of the day's experience. I doubted if any preacher had ever had such an

introduction to his charge. The question that troubled me most was "How shall I get hold of those Boggs boys?" I reviewed my boyhood days, but could not call to mind any time when we had ever bound one of our fellows hand and foot. I wondered if the Boggs boys had been playing Abram and Isaac, and had bound George preparatory to offering him on the altar. This I thought could not be, for the Bible story had never, to my knowledge, led to such play. As I stated before, I was young, and had never connected myself with any secret fraternities, or I would not so readily have rejected the thought that the story of sacrificing Isaac had led to the binding of George Summers.

I was sure that the boys had a leader, or had been reading some very unwholesome literature; perhaps both influences were working on them. In either case, the problem was complex; and calling to mind the remark of one of the young men to Deacon Bentley, I was not disposed to think the Boggs boys beyond redemption. I had heard and seen enough already to reach the conclusion that the fathers of Kiddville were not very confiding and companionable with their boys. This last thought drew my heart to the boys. I trembled when I thought what I probably would have been had I not had a most companionable father. Oh, how I wished I could see him then! How greatly I needed his wise counsel!

Kneeling by the side of the bed on which baby Grace was sleeping, I prayed for wisdom, and solemnly pledged the Heavenly Father to do all in my power to lead the boys and young men of Kiddville into His Kingdom. My devotions were interrupted by baby Grace shouting, "Gan-Pa! Gan-Pa!" Her face was covered with smiles, and her eyes fairly sparkled

as she scrambled to get off the bed. I turned and looked behind me, and there was my father standing in the open door.

I was surprised beyond measure. After I had calmed myself, however, I could see that I had no occasion for surprise; for I had never stood in need of my father's companionship and counsel that he had not come to the rescue. I told him of my experiences and of the solemn pledge. He gave the closest attention until I had finished, and then made this characteristic speech:

"Well, my son, I am thinking that you have been called to the office of 'cowboy' instead of pastor or shepherd. You must first become acquainted with the nature and disposition of the stock you are herding; then you must know the plains on which they are grazing, as well as the fountain at which they drink; next, you must become acquainted with the enemies that prowl in the mountains and caves—the wolves that enter the fold and last, you must live where—though not as—your herds live. There are some very exciting experiences and rough riding ahead of you, but if you keep all these things in view, and faithfully do your duty, regardless of what people say, it is my opinion that you will corral the kids of Kiddville. And, if you do not, I am very sure it will not be the fault of the 'Palm Tree.'"

Palm Tree is my wife's christian name—or rather, her name is Tamar, which means palm tree. My father called her Palm Tree because of her hospitality and kindness, but especially because she sheltered his son.

It was within a half hour of time for the evening service

when my wife returned from Brother Summers's. She received my father kindly and without surprise. He explained to her that in passing back to his home in western Illinois, after selling a large herd of cattle in New York, he had found time to come by way of Racketsburgh. Arriving in that town in time for the morning service, he worshiped there, and one of the brethern had brought him to Kiddville that afternoon. It would be a flying visit, but all the more enjoyable.

My wife informed us that as soon as the evening services were over she would return to George Summers. Her report of George's condition was that he was still unconscious, but was moaning pitiously and murmuring something which they were unable to understand.

At the evening services the church was crowded to overflowing. Now, there were present a large number of young men with their lady friends. My father aided me in the opening service (for, while he was a farmer, he occasionally preached). His presence was an inspiration to me. All effort to orate passed from my mind. I saw in his face an inspiration to win the hearts of the people by delivering the message of life. After the sermon many of the members whom I had never met came up and spoke to me. They all received my father very warmly. I felt that after all there was not much gained by being a young preacher. One good brother, whom I had seen sitting on the front seat in the morning, said to me: "I'm thinkin' the best way to git good preachin' out of you is to keep your father here." This remark may have been intended for a compliment, but it touched me so deeply that when we had reached home I told my father about it.

He comforted me by saying that from what he could see and hear he thought it my first duty to win the friendship and confidence of the people, especially the young men, and preach to them later on. He insisted that when the time came that preaching was the chief article in demand, I would be able to supply the market if at present I did my duty as cowboy.



CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH MESSAGE.



ON OUR return home my wife went at once to Brother Summers's. I did not have time to talk with her concerning the manner in which the doctor had dismissed me from the scene of suffering, and now that my father was to leave on the morrow I felt the necessity of improving the opportunity of taking further counsel with him. Deacon Bentley and his wife accompanied Mrs. Atwood to her watch. Father and I talked till midnight, and I attribute much of my success in after life to that evening's interview. He related to me the experiences of his boyhood, and further told me very many things about my childhood, all of which had passed out of my mind. When I retired I felt that I had lived my life over again. I also had a much higher appreciation of my father's friendship. All these things strengthened my resolution to come into the companionable friendship of the boys of Kiddville that were in the stress period of life.

When I retired I soon fell into a deep sleep, into which there came a vision that I shall never forget. It appeared that I was crossing a plain, and came upon a lone emigrant,

an old man, with his wife and son. They had stopped for their dinner. Their horses, tied to long ropes, were feeding a few yards away. The father, mother and son appeared very happy as they sat within the shadow of a canvas they had stretched from their wagon. The father told me that he was intending to enter some land in the name of the boy, and spend his remaining days preparing a home for him. When I looked into the face of the lad my heart was drawn to him, and I felt that these parents were making no mistake in dedicating their lives to his future. Our conversation was interrupted by a roaring sound, and, lifting our eyes to the south, we saw a large herd of cattle coming directly toward us.

"A stampede! The Lord have mercy on us!" said the father. The pony on which I was sitting took fright, and before I could get him under control had borne me away from the danger. The sight of the stampede was most thrilling. In the lead a number of large steers were running with all their might. By the side of these leaders on his pony a cowboy was riding. Already he was beginning to change the course of these leaders, but yet he had not sufficient control to prevent a part of the herd from dashing over the lone emigrant and his loved ones. Through the dust that followed I could see the wreck of the overturned wagon, and bending over the lifeless boy was the father. As, in my dream, I hastened to the heartbroken parents, a heavy rap upon my door awoke me. Answering the alarm at the door I admitted a messenger, who informed me that Dr. Quick wished me to come at once to the home of Brother Summers.

Leaving the house and Grace in the care of my father, I

hastened away. I met the doctor at the door, and he said tenderly:

"We will need you now, Parson. I think a word of prayer will be comforting and helpful to these old people."

He led the way into the room, where the boy was lying on a cot that stood in the center of the room. On one side of the cot sat the father; on the other, my wife was standing by the side of the aged mother caressing her gray hairs and speaking consolingly to her. Both parents were watching the boy's pale face, and they took no notice of us as we entered. The doctor led me to the father's side, and then said very tenderly (so very tenderly that I looked to see if it really was the same man whom I had heard speak so heartlessly to the people the day before):

"Father Summers, here is your pastor. Would you like that we should pray with you?"

"I would," replied the father, never moving his eyes from his boy.

Then I, a young man—a mere boy, inexperienced in life, unacquainted with sorrow, knowing scarcely anything of a father's love and nothing of a father's sorrow—tried to pray with those parents, whose very life was wrapped up in the life of their only son, the child of their old age. My work at first seemed hollow and meaningless. I could scarcely speak. Then it appeared that my own heart would break. I was beginning to sympathize—suffer with those who suffered. It was a score of years before I knew how truly and fully I was placing my heart side by side with those parents. The solemn

and reverential "amen" alone told me how faithfully I had discharged my duty as a petitioner before the Throne of Grace.

The parents still sat in silence for fully ten minutes, when the father, looking up into the face of the physician, said:

"Dear doctor, is there not one ray of hope? Can you not do something more to save him? He is our only treasure on earth."

"No hope, father," said the doctor, as he knelt and placed his arms around the old man, "I have done all in my power."

"And will he never speak to us again?"

"He may," said the doctor, consolingly. "We can only watch and wait; but it will be only a word."

A half hour more was spent in watch; the physician occasionally examining the pulse or tenderly caressing the hand of the sufferer.

Then the sufferer's eyes opened, and a bright expression of consciousness came into his face.

"Mother!" he said distinctly. Instantly the mother bent over him, kissed him tenderly, and said:

"Yes, my child, mother is here." Then she drew back and the father drew near, and in trembling voice said:

"Son, do you know me? Speak, my precious boy. Do you know me?"

"Father," was the labored reply.

The physician's hand was upon the pulse, and his jet black eyes were watching for the first ray of hope. I was repeatedly glancing into his face, knowing that his face would first give

evidence of any possible chance of the boy's recovery. But it became more clouded, and the sufferer's breath came slowly.

"Father," he whispered, and we all held our breath and bent low, each feeling that the dreaded moment was near. "Don't b-l-a-m-e the boys."

"Oh! precious soul!" sobbed the mother. "So Christlike."

"H-e-l-p," and it appeared for a moment that his life had left him. Then he opened his eyes again and said faintly and imploringly, "H-e-l-p."

"O doctor," said the father, "his pleading will take my life. Is there one thing more you can do to help him?"

"His help must come from beyond," said the physician.

"H-e-l-p."

"Yes," said the father. "We are helping you all we can. Jesus will help you soon."

"No," said the boy, a shadow coming over his face, "Help get," and his eyes turned to his mother.

"Oh!" said the mother. "He wants us to get something."

"What do you want us to get?"

"The b-o-y-s."

"Help get the boys. What boys?"

"All."

"What shall we get all boys?"

"O-u-t," was the next word so faintly spoken that we could scarcely distinguish it.

"Be quick," said the doctor, "or you will loose his message. Let me speak to him." Then placing his face close to the sufferer he said clamly: "Yes, George, we hear you, 'Help get all boys out.' Out of what?"

The eyelids quivered, but could not open. The lips moved and we were conscious that all remaining strength was being summoned to frame an answer. They were scarcely audible, but we all caught these words:

"S-i-m B-a-t-e-s's c-l-a-s-s."

The sweet, calm, peaceful smile settled over his face, and his Father's promised help had come.

The father and mother dropped upon their knees and buried their faces in the pillow upon which the head of their lifeless boy was resting. The doctor—the rough, heartless doctor, as I but yesterday judged him to be—knelt by the side of the father, and offered the sweetest, most submissive and consoling prayer that I ever heard. My wife stood leaning on my arm, looking upon the wreck and ruin of a home which had come so suddenly and mysteriously, and which she and the physician had labored so hard to prevent. Then the mother's heart went out after her home, and she whispered:

"Where is baby Grace?"

"Safe at home with father," I replied.

"Yes," said the heart-stricken father, arising, for he must have heard my words to my wife, "He is safe at home with our Father."

The morning had dawned beautiful and bright, sunbeams were streaming in at the windows, and fell upon the face of the boy as a neighbor drew a napkin over it.

"This is a beautiful morning on which to enter the Father's house," I said.

"Yes," replied the father, "so much like himself. He was

all brightness and sunshine. We shall not be long separated, for the night of my sorrow is nearly passed."

When we left the house the doctor accompanied us. We could talk of nothing but the sad scene we had witnessed.

"It is, in some respects," said the doctor, "the most remarkable case I have ever met in over thirty years' constant practice. I believe he must have known all that we did and said, and yet he was unable to speak till the very last."

"What do you think of what he said?" I asked.

"I think he said just what he intended to say, but his words were meaningless."

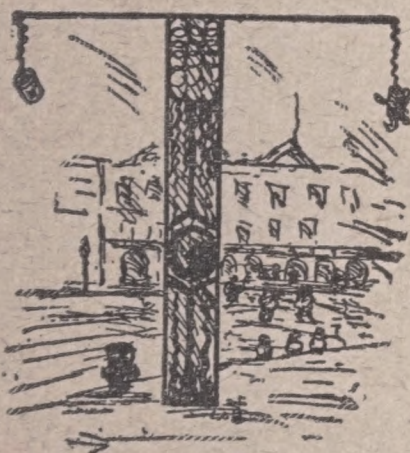
"Who is Sim Bates?" asked my wife.

"Sim Bates," he replied, "is a good-for-nothing, drinking devil that you can see loafing around town. He is fit for nothing on earth except to run a threshing engine. He has no class and never had. Instead of throwing light on the cause of his death the boy has only made it the more mysterious."



CHAPTER V.

SAVING THE LIFE OF A KID.



THE DEATH of George Summers aroused the people, and an earnest effort was made to find the guilty party. The grand jury took the matter in hand, but no indictments were made. Bill Featherweight proved by unimpeachable witnesses that he was not in Kiddville on the day of George's death. While many persons thought he was the boy who escaped from the wreck at the church, others believed differently, and no one could be found who, upon his oath, could state positively that he saw Will in the wreck. The Boggs boys, of course, were closely questioned and cross-questioned as to what they knew about the case. They admitted that the calves hitched to the sled were theirs, but denied any personal connection whatever with the death of the Summers boy. They said that they were in the barn playing cards, in company with some neighbor boys, when they heard a noise and rushed out only in time to see the calves, sled and boys go dashing through the barn lot and across the pasture towards the church. Who the boy was

that escaped they did not know, but took him to be Will Featherweight.

The boys told their stories so straight at all times and under the closest cross-question of the attorneys that nothing could be found against them. The testimony of Joseph Boggs and wife corroborated the story of their sons. The parents made no effort to shield their sons from any reports circulated about them, and admitted that, like most of the boys of Kiddville, they were wild and always looking for fun. The father said that an hour before the accident he had seen the calves in the woods pasture, and that the boys had not left the barn between that time and when he saw the calves rush through his barnyard.

Many persons blamed the Boggs boys with the whole affair, and declared that their father was lying in order to keep his sons out of prison. Others believed that the boys had spoken the truth; but their position only made the death of George more mysterious. Father Summers, remembering his son's last words, was least of all disposed to blame the boys. Indeed, he tried to prevent any investigation of the case. What George meant by "Bates's class" the father did not know, but he felt sure that it was his duty to help the Boggs boys rather than to blame and prosecute them.

Deacon Bentley said that Brother Summers was very foolish in his position, that trouble and old age were telling on him. "As for myself," said the deacon, "I will never rest until I solve the mystery connected with George's death."

In the course of time the people ceased to gossip about the

tragedy, and soon lost interest in it, though they did not forget it. I gave myself to pastoral work. At each meeting of the official board I tried to interest the brethren in some special work for boys and young men. At one time I suggested that the pastor, elders and deacons practice up a little on baseball, and then ask the young men to join with them in a match game. I argued that this would show to the boys that we were mortals—only boys older grown, and that while wise from experience we had not lost our love for innocent sports, and especially for boys who always love sports. My suggestion was instantly killed by Deacon Bentley, who said: “I do not propose to make a fool of myself in such a manner, and I don’t think any other members of the board will either.”

I kept my temper and argued that I could see no harm that could come from such a course, and that I thought it would be the part of wise men—not of fools—to win and hold the boys of Kiddville in the company of Christians. When the deacon flew into a passion, however, and said that he believed in answering a fool according to his folly, and that as long as the church had a boy for a preacher, the officers of the church would have boys’ play brought before them, I could not entirely restrain my feeling. So I said: “Mr. President, I move that Deacon Bentley be appointed a committee of one to collect the boys of Kiddville into a class and teach them to play marbles scientifically. I have observed that he is an enthusiast in that game, and spends much time playing on the streets with Sim Bates, Lon Bass, Will Pegg and other fellows of that stripe. I am convinced that he could assert a

far better Christian influence by playing with the boys of the town."

My motion was not seconded, but it had the desired effect. It cooled the deacon amazingly. He arose, and though his face was scarlet, he said meekly: "I confess I was too fast in speaking as I did, and I beg the brother's pardon. I can see how Brother Atwood, young as he is, feels very close to our boys and young men. I am glad that he feels as he does, and I shall be glad to see him in any way that he can become their friend and companion. But I do think he is making a mistake when he asks us, men that we are—some of us beyond the meridian of life—to try to come as close to these boys as we can to men of our own age. We cannot do it. Again, I ask the brother to forgive me for my abruptness. I extend him my hand, and promise him my hearty support as long as he is our pastor."

The deacon's sudden change was such a surprise to me that I could not speak. I grasped his hand, shook it heartily, and the subject was dropped for the time.

At another time I made an effort to get the officials and as many brethren as I could to ask the boys and young men to join us for three days in camping and fishing on Big Run. But this suggestion, like all others that I made looking to bringing Christian men and the boys into enjoyable companionship, was set aside.

At last I proposed that we call a meeting for boys and men only, and take counsel with the boys and see in what sort of special work they would be interested; but this suggestion

was completely killed by Elder Knoall, who said: "If Brother Atwood cannot find some better work to bring before the officers of the church I move that we look for a pastor who can." This remark completely crushed me. I saw at once that all efforts along this line would be suicidal. Had it not been for my wife I would have presented my resignation at once, and sought a more congenial field of labor. She laughed at all my fears, and said that if I would let the officers alone and follow my father's suggestion to live where the herds live, and come to know their natures and perils, I would soon find all the work to do that I could handle.

At once I set about to get close to the boys. I had now been in Kiddville about three months. I knew most of the boys; that is, I knew to what families they belonged. They were very shy of me, however, and I felt that it was very important that I should get hold of the Boggs boys first.

Freddie Boggs—not one of the much talked of Boggs boys, but a little four-year-old—had been very sick for some days with pneumonia. I thought it might be possible that I could call to see the child, but, from what people told me, I feared that I, a preacher, would not be kindly received. One day just as I had about resolved to take the risks and call on the Boggsses the doctor came driving up to the gate and called for my wife.

"Mrs. Atwood," he said, "the Boggs kid is going to die. There's nobody there that's got a thimbleful of brains. If you can go over it'll be a Godsend for them."

"I'll go," she said, as she rushed into the house to make preparations.

"Doctor, can I be of service?" I asked, thinking only to express my willingness to give aid.

"No!" he replied gruffly. "They are not needing any praying now. The further you keep away from the Bogges at present the better."

By this time my wife had returned. She had under her arm a bundle of red flannel, and in her right hand a large bottle filled with some yellow fluid.

"What have you in that bottle?" asked the doctor, as I was helping her into his buggy.

"The richest chicken oil you ever saw," said my wife.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, "I have been sending all over creation for some, but could not find it. It is too late now. You'll waste the oil if you put it on the kid. He'll die, sure."

Soon after this I saw the doctor driving back to his office leisurely. It was nearing sundown of the same day when I saw him in his buggy go flying past my door. He was driving for dear life. "Somebody badly hurt or killed," I said to myself. "Prayers not wanted or he would have stopped for me."

An hour later I heard him coming back singing, "O, Think of the Home Over There." His fine, thoroughbred roadster was moving along at a snail's pace, head down like a plow horse. Stopping at my gate, the doctor called me out and

said: "Your wife told me to tell you she would not come home to-night. She said you could get your supper with some of the brethren or do without, just as you pleased; but to be sure to take good care of baby Grace."

"How is the sick boy?"

"As fine as a fiddle. She has him so wrapped up in red flannel and chicken grease that you can't tell him from a lobster out of the pot."

"He is better then, is he?"

"Better!" he replied, "he will get well as sure as fate. You could not kill him if you tried."

"Well, I am glad," I said.

"Say, Parson," he continued, "you've got a jewel for a wife—a palm tree in a desert, a balm in Gilead."

"Thank you!" I said.

"The truth is," he went on, "if you understood your business half as well as she does hers you would revolutionize this town in a few years."

Then he drew up the lines and drove away, laughing till people could hear him for two squares. What there was to laugh at, I could not see. What he meant, I did not know.

CHAPTER VI.

HITTING THE MARK.



REDDIE BOGGS did get well. Through care for him my wife won the hearts of the Boggs family. This, however, was of no particular advantage to me except that through her I gained a knowledge of the family, which consisted of seven members. There were first the father and the mother.

The oldest son was Andrewy—sometimes called Shortie, not because he was short, but because he was the shortest of the Boggs boys. The others were very large for their ages. In years Shortie was somewhere between eighteen and nineteen.

Then came the twins, Herman and Theo. They were no further from eighteen on the lower side than Shortie was on the upper. Edwin, the fourth boy, was crowding on towards his seventeenth year. These four were so near alike in size, age and disposition that they were always looked upon as being the same. It was said that when they were younger and smaller they could be seen wandering about down the roads, over farms, through the woods and along the streams like motherless turkeys, looking for grasshoppers. And, turkey-like, they were very wild and shy of strangers, and only went home at night to roost. Freddie, the youngest, we have a-

ready introduced. Old Father Time had placed a chasm of over fourteen years in width between him and his youngest brother, so he was the object of the entire family's affection and adoration. However devious the ways in which his oldest brothers might travel, they had each marked out for Freddie a very straight path. And when his life swung in the balance, and Dr. Quick had in his own way informed the father that he would soon have a deeper interest in the little burying ground back of the church than he ever thought he could have, the world, with all its pleasures, sports and wealth appeared very vain and small. It was at that particular moment that Mr. Boggs, in his wild grief, said: "Doc, if you will save the boy I'll give you the best forty acres of land I've got."

"Don't see how I could do it Boggs," replied the doctor, "if you give me a warranty deed to your whole farm and a quit-claim to the church lot and graveyard. If you would like to have a little prayer service I'll go for the preacher."

"No!" said the father, "if the boy's got to die we'll get along without a preacher," and he turned from the physician and steeled himself for the inevitable. It was at this hour that my wife came into the house. The doctor did not even enter with her. But in his blunt way said, as he was helping her out of the buggy, "People don't need introduction when they are facing death. You've got sense enough to be useful," and then he rode away.

The family did not know who she was or when she entered the house, but they soon became conscious of the presence of a woman who was working with the child, and directing

the members of the family as though she was mistress of the place. They were not long in discerning a change in the patient, and when the stranger ordered Shortie to go for the doctor and tell him that if he would come back he could save the boy Andrew lost no time.

When the doctor had returned and pronounced the child very much better, he astonished Mother Boggs and the entire family by saying, "Mr. Boggs, this is Mrs. Atwood, the young preacher's wife. If you will leave Freddie in her care till morning and do everything she tells you to I'll go her security that the boy gets well." Again he left, only stopping long enough to get the message he delivered me.

But, as I have said, my wife's winning the hearts of the Boggses was of little help to me. Mr. Boggs afterwards said to a neighbor: "A preacher and a preacher's wife are entirely different critters. We swear by Mrs. Atwood at our house, but we have got no use for the beardless up-start of a preacher."

Boggs and his boys always spoke to my wife when they passed, but they merely looked at me and answered my salutations very indifferently. By and by Mrs. Boggs and Freddie called at the parsonage, and after some months I felt that I had partially won the respect of Mrs. Boggs. But I soon found that gaining the confidence of mother and winning the respect and friendship of her sons are two distinct tasks. It is much like gaining the love of a girl and the confidence of her father at the same time—not often attained by the same individual.

At last I decided to make a specialty of the boys. An opportunity presented itself in a very unexpected way. In truth, I never thought of getting a hold on the boys by such means. I relate it because I am confident that good men are looking over the little and seemingly useless means by which they could win the admiration and confidence of boys.

The officers of the church had been annoyed by the way in which the church spire was being damaged by woodpeckers boring holes in it. One day I was standing at my gate when Edwin passed, carrying a large old-fashioned rifle. I said to him, playfully, "Edwin, if you will kill that red head on the church spire, I'll give you a dime."

"I wouldn't shoot at it," he replied, "if you would give me a dollar."

"Why not?"

"'Cause if you splintered the spire the whole meetin' house would be on you. You'd never hear the last of it."

"Is your gun loaded?" I asked.

"Yes, and she's a good'n; goes right where you hold her."

"Loan me the gun and I will kill the bird." He smiled as he handed me the gun, saying sarcastically: "I'll bet you will. Pap says preachers never hit the mark."

I took the gun, raised it to my face, and was about to fire when the boy touched my arm and said: "Say, Parson, if you splinter that spire Deacon Bentley and Daddy Knoall will be on your back with both their feet."

I looked straight into the boy's eyes and said: "You are mistaken."

Adjusting my position so that no part of the spire was between me and the bird, I took aim and shaved the bird off without touching the spire.

"Whillikers!" he exclaimed. "You're a 'crack shot,' eh?"

"No," I replied, "but I think every man ought to know how to shoot a gun."

He looked at me in surprise as he took the gun out of my hands. Giving him a nickle, I said: "That will buy ammunition for that load."

His eyes took on a peculiar squint as he said: "I don't want that, it's worth a dollar to see a preacher shoot like that."

As I entered the house my wife said: "You hit the mark once, didn't you?"

"I can do that every time," I replied, for I really prided myself in my skill as a marksman.

"There now," said she, "I did not mean the bird. You have caught that Boggs boy. Don't you know it?"

At that time I put but little store in the incident. I soon noticed a change in Edwin, however. He would stop a moment at the gate. It was not long until I learned that he had filled the town with his praises of the preacher's skill as a marksman. Then I began to seek a close acquaintance and friendship.

One evening I was sitting in my door reading when he stopped a moment, and I made some inquiries as to books he had read.

"Nothing," he said, "except 'rithmetic and g'ography."

I gave him Oliver Optics's "Now or Never." He took it, saying, "I'll bring it back as good as I got it."

When he returned it he apologized for keeping it so long by saying:

"Every last Boggs on the place had to read it 'cept Freddie, and pap read it to him. It's a good one." I continued to furnish him with the books I had read when a boy. While I was getting the boys to read a little I was not getting into their company. That was what I was seeking. I now and then caught evidence of my hold on the family. The father would greet me more respectfully when he passed. My wife suggested that it might be possible that I would have to win the Boggs boys at long range.

I was not devoting myself to these persons exclusively all this time. But, on the contrary, was doing some very effectual work in other directions. I decided that it would be quite necessary for me to come in to touch with men, even the less noble men, if my work for boys and young men should be effectual.

My sarcasm used on Deacon Bentley had leaked out in some way and given Sim Bates, Lon Bass and Bill Pegg offense. This I learned by overhearing the conversation of some fellows of that stripe.

While these persons and men of their class were the least honorable citizens, I saw that they were in touch with the very class I was desiring to help, and that they could neutralize every effort that I put forth. I resolved, therefore, to take my father's advice, and "live where the herd lived." The opportunity to do so came about in a very peculiar and unexpected manner.

CHAPTER VII.

"BIRDS OF A FEATHER."



NOW THERE lived in Kiddville a certain character by the name of Captain Joel Two-coats, a bosom friend of Lon Bass, who had once been a member of the church. They were still what the old lady called "hangers on," attending church spasmodically, with long periods of loafing, fishing and drinking between spasms. Their wives, however, were as intelligent and spiritual women as could be found in the county. Lon was a shiftless fellow—a carpenter by trade, and a good mechanic, but so mortal lazy that his wife made the living. Captain—or Cap Twoc, as everybody called him—had been a captain in the army, and was a very patriotic and heroic soldier. He carried a bit of Confederate lead under his shoulder blade that at times threw him into such a state of intense suffering that he only found relief by filling up to the brim with ardent spirits. At such times his wife took him in hand and kept him shut in till he was able to appear on the streets clothed in his right mind. It was said that he could carry the biggest load of liquor and not show it of any man in the county. He drew a large pension, and, his wife

possessing two very valuable farms, he found no occasion for work.

Unlike Lon Bass, Sim Bates or Bill Pegg, he could go into the very best society. He attended all weddings, birthday parties, family reunions, church festivals and the like. He was considered a very important factor in politics. He spent most of his time (when not shut in) loafing in stores, on street corners telling war stories and discussing the failure of church members. So that there was not a man in Kiddville who was as morally and religiously useless, and yet touched life in as many places as Captain Joel Twocoats.

In many respects his power was marvelous. He could make an inexperienced preacher think himself the most eloquent orator that had ever filled a Kiddville pulpit, and the next day, perhaps, Cap would perforate his sermon with some sharp sarcasm, and the preacher would become the laughing stock in the eyes of all who had heard the blowing up which the captain had given him.

The Fourth of July came on Sunday. I persuaded the brethren to have an all-day grove meeting. There was a large gathering of people from near and far. I delivered what the news correspondent called "A religeo-patriotic oration, unequalled by anything that had ever been delivered in the State." (Of course, this correspondent had heard everything that had been delivered, and was a most competent judge.) Something that I said caught the captain. Deacon Bentley said that I had struck the cap so hard that I had given the Confederate bullet under his shoulder blade a twist and

awakened all the patriotism. Anyway, I had pleased Cap Twocoats, and he was not long in exalting me to a very lofty position in the minds of the boys—Lon Bass, Bill Pegg, Sim Bates and their stripe.

Cap met me a few days later and told me that he and the boys wanted me to go with them on a camping and fishing expedition. "The fellows are a little tough at times," he said, "but they are big-hearted, and you can do them good if you will go with us."

I seized the opportunity, and told him I would be very glad to go. Ten days later, in a large four-seated hack, in company with seven men, we drove down to the center of town, and stopped at the store for a moment. Captain Twocoats and I, with a sixteen-year-old boy as driver, occupied the front seat. Bill Pegg, Lon Bass and Sim Bates brought up the rear. Another wagon loaded with tents, cooking utensils, provisions and a cook, had gone before. Passersby were making sharp remarks, and women and children stood in doors and by gates to see the campers go out of town. Across the street was Dr. Quick's office. I really hoped to get out of town without attracting his attention, but just as we were ready to start he stepped to the door and yelled out, "Great Caesar! Birds of a feather! Say, Cap, you're going to take a praying machine with you this time, are you? Well, the Lord knows you need him if you all get as drunk as you did the last time." The crowd laughed and sent back many sharp answers as we drove away. Amidst the shouting I heard the doctor say:

"Parson, if you need my help, send for me."

* * * *

By evening we were comfortably settled in our tents, and the cook spread our first regular meal. As we gathered round the table the fellows appeared embarrassed from some cause. To throw this off Sim Bates made an unchaste remark, at which the boy laughed so heartily that he could not restrain himself, when Captain Twocoats said:

"Boys, this is the first time we ever had a preacher with us, hadn't we better have prayers before meals?"

"Yes," said the majority of the crowd, but the boy was still laughing as the captain, nodding at me, said:

"Proceed, Parson."

I offered a brief word of thanks, and there came to my mind my father's words, "Live where they live, not as they live." Mentally I prayed for strength and wisdom so to live.

That evening a few lines were set, and some plans made for the morrow's sport. Then we gathered around a little fire that had been kindled and story-telling began. At first these stories were enjoyable, but as the fellows began to feel free and easy they became more bold, and the tone of the jokes and stories took a shadiness that was very disagreeable to me. The more impure the jokes became the more the sixteen-year-old boy saw to laugh at. I tried to turn the drift of conversation by relating some laughable experiences in my own life, and repeating some pure witticism which I had read. But the current was too strong for me. The coarser fellows evidently discerned my purpose, and went so far in the other direction that Cap Twocoats called an abrupt halt and suggested it was time to turn it.

On the morrow I took my rifle, and, in company with the boy driver and two others, went on a hunting expedition. When in the middle of the afternoon we returned to the camp my comrades were so loud in my praise as a marksman that a shooting match was got up, in which I took great delight, feeling that I had, excelling in one point, won the admiration of all in the camp. The following night two fellows were out fishing the whole night. The evening conversation was no better than the evening before. The third day the whole company spent in fishing, where I felt that I was at a disadvantage. I knew little about fishing, and nothing whatever about catching bass. I put myself, however, under the tutorship of Lon Bass, Bill Pegg and Sim Bates. Some time in the middle of the forenoon my line took on life suddenly. My reel began to spin. Awaking to the situation, I instantly stopped the reel and surged upon the pole with all my strength, bringing to the surface of the water somewhere near the middle of the stream a fish that looked to be something like a foot in length. I gave a second surge, when my line snapped, and I heard Sim Bates blurt out:

"Blasted fool, you habn't got sense enough to keep out of the fire. That was the biggest bass I ever saw in the creek, and got away because a preacher didn't have sense enough to land him."

These remarks drew from all who heard them a laugh that greatly rasped my feeling. Sim made no apologies, but turned away mumbling something that I could not understand. That I was deeply wounded counted for nothing with

him, and with some of the others in the camp. If I couldn't fish well I could do nothing well in their estimation. I was greatly disheartened and wished myself at home, for I had lost in fishing all I had gained in shooting.

Captain Twocoats came to me and apologized for Sim and the other fellows, saying: "It's just as I told you, the fellows are tough but big-hearted. Besides, they have a little liquor ahead, I'm thinking." These words might have been somewhat conciliatory if they had not been borne upon a breath scented with bad whisky.

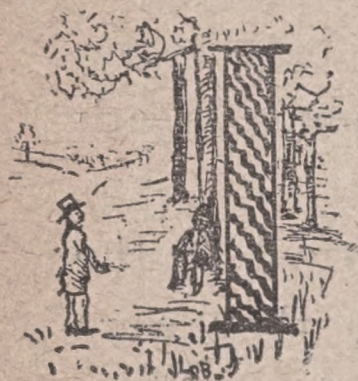
I withdrew myself from the fishers and returned to the camp. In the evening when the men came in they were greatly under the influence of liquor. Their loud laughing, coarse and obscene story-telling, was humiliating beyond measure. The boy, however, was greatly enjoying everything he saw and heard, and laughed unceasingly.

By morning everybody in camp was drunk except myself.



CHAPTER VIII.

DR. QUICK'S PRESCRIPTION.



HAD come to live "where the herd lived," and had found the "fountain" at which some of the boys "drank" freely. I could not think of leaving. I knew that they were not themselves. I was in the midst of the stampede—cowboy sure enough, side by side with

the leaders of the herd. My dream and the words of my father came back to me. That I had reached the point where I must do some "rough riding" I could not doubt. The day was one of hilarity. The jug was brought out and they drank in my presence. They were not all dead drunk, but they were all under the influence of liquor, and were behaving just as whisky makes men behave. It does not effect all men alike. It made penniless Lon Bass a millionaire. He boasted of his wealth in a manner that I would have supposed impossible. It made a prize fighter of one of the fellows, and he did not have to wait long till he found his match. No sooner was the drunken fight over than the bellicose parties became bosom friends, and cooed and cuddled over each other in a sickening manner. Sim Bates's whisky converted him into a preacher, to whom all the others gave audience, sing-

ing, praying or shouting as he might direct. He quoted scripture glibly, and some of his thoughts would have graced any pulpit; others would have caused fiends to blush. I watched it all, wishing for counsel, not knowing what to do. At last Sim shouted:

"Say, fellows, this meetin' will never be a success till we baptize some fellow. There's Cap Twocoats, he didn't join meetin' right any how; let's baptize him." Then they started in a half stupor. Twocoats was sitting on the ground and leaning his back against a tree. He gave a sickening smile at the fellows and said:

"Be keerful, fellers! Be keerful!"

I sprang to the captain's side, and giving Sim, who was just putting his hands on Twocoats, a shove, sent him sprawling on his face. I said:

"Stop, men, you shall not do such a sacrilegious thing!"

They all stood back and laughed heartily at Sim, who, scrambling to his feet, struck an attitude, and said:

"Get behind me, Satan, or I'll have to cast you out."

"No you will not!" I said, "but you fellows shall stop these shameful proceedings."

Again he reached for his victim, when I gave him another push which sent him against the bystanders so violently that one of them sat down with great emphasis, at the same time uttering an oath that made my blood run cold. When Sim regained his feet I saw that he was very angry. Placing himself squarely in front of me, and addressing the others, he said:

"If you fellows will stand by me I'll put the devil out of camp."

"Go ahead, Sim," they shouted, "we'll stand by you."

"All right!" he said. "As Moses resisted the serpent in the wilderness, I'll"—and he sprang at me like a wild beast. I leaped to one side and struck him a blow that dropped him to the ground as suddenly as if he had been shot.

"Good!" I heard some one say. "Parson, that is the best lick you have struck since you came to Kiddville." And there stood by my side Dr. Quick. If an angel had dropped down from heaven I would have been no more surprised, neither would he have been more heartily welcomed by me.

No sooner did the others discover the doctor at my side than they began to laugh and shake hands. Sim, gathering himself up, came to me with an outstretched arm, saying:

"Parson, you're a blamed fool on fishin', but you know how to shoot and strike." I took his hand as I said:

"I'm glad you are learning that I can do some things well."

Then they went for the jug, but I had emptied all the grog that I could find on the ground, knowing that camp would not break up till the whisky ran out. They were much angered over the disappearance of the liquor, and bid fair to get into a quarrel, when the doctor said:

"Don't fight over it, fellows. I've got a little in my buggy, enough for you to sober up on. You can have it if you will agree to sober up and come home."

They all agreed to do so, and he continued in a drawling tone: "If I did not know you would you could not have a

drop of it." Then he started for his buggy. I followed him a few yards and said:

"Doctor, do not give them any more. They have had enough." He stopped, and, facing me, said:

"Did not I tell you you do not understand your business? When I want you to prescribe for my patients I'll call you. Go back to the camp; you need not drink unless you want to." There it was, I had run up against the thorny side of the doctor once more. Really he was becoming more and more a puzzle to me.

When he returned he urged the fellows to drink freely. He insisted upon my tasting it, but I stoutly refused. He even poured it down the captain, who growled at being forced to drink when he had enough.

Then the doctor and I took a walk back to the buggy, where we talked quite a while. "There is one thing about this matter," I said, "for which I am thankful."

"What is that?"

"The boy did not see the outrageous proceedings to-day. He is in a drunken sleep."

"Well," said the doctor, "I guess all those fellows are about ready to see me again. Let us go back. They will never forget to-day's drunk."

When we reached the camp they were the sickest set of men I had ever placed my eyes upon. They begged and prayed the doctor to give them assistance, but he only laughed at them or jeeringly told them that Sim's sermons ought to have prepared them all for death. Then he said: "It would be a blessing on the community and your friends if you would

die." I became alarmed at the condition of some of the men. When they did begin to get relief they all wanted to go home. A sicker and more humiliated set of men never broke up camp. We landed them in Kiddville about midnight.

The doctor boldly declared that their sickness was a mystery to him. The whisky, he said, was twenty-year-old bourbon, just what he used in typhoid fever. The men could not remember much about what occurred, only that they were very sick. The truth was we were all sick. While I did not live as they lived, I was not as sick as they were, yet I was sick. Two points only had I gained: First, a knowledge of how the herd lived; second, I had shown to the people that I was willing to be companionable and loyal to men just as I found them.

This last point was an important one. I soon found the way to be with men. I attended all primary conventions of my party, all spelling schools and general gatherings to which I was invited. I won many prizes at shooting matches. I went on hunting expeditions and sleigh rides with the young men and boys. I preached in nearly all neighboring schoolhouses, and was quite popular when it came to marrying people.

Mrs. Atwood had not been idle all this time. The doctor had thoroughly introduced her to the sick and needy people. Nor was this all—she threw open wide the doors of the parsonage, not for tea parties, "Mugby junction" suppers, and festivals, but for the purpose of making it homelike to those

whose homes were unpleasant. Young as she was, many loved her and counseled with her as a mother. Young men who were in a measure shy of me on the street, in the church or in other person's homes, were in my own home quite companionable. She did not teach a Sunday school class of boys, but she prevailed on Dr. Quick to take up this work. She declared that if she had to nurse his patients he must teach hers. And such a class as it was, I shall never forget. There, as elsewhere, he had his thorny as well as tender and sympathetic side. He permitted no one except Mrs. Atwood to make any suggestions concerning his class. And what was strange, he held every young man that he got hold of. He said: "They don't dare leave me. They might die if they did."

I had been in Kiddville about three years, and was beginning to flatter myself that I was turning the course of things. In other words, I was beginning to "round up" the stampede of years, when a sensational evangelist—a woman—struck the community with the force of a Western cyclone. I supposed that my work would be utterly destroyed in the midst of the great religious excitement that would follow the appearance of this preacher. I adjourned all my meetings and attended the revival. I also recommended that my people should attend en mass, which they did. Some of the scenes that were enacted during this meeting were so unreasonable and contrary to the spirit of Christianity that I could scarcely restrain myself from crying out against them. But I continued to be a silent observer, and carefully studied the effect which the excitement was having on the young

people. Scores of souls were reported converted. I am sure I rejoiced in their conversion. But when the noise of the "religious storm" had passed away I found that the face of the country remained the same, and I went back to my work to wait patiently the full development of the harvest time. I had a few ardent supporters. Among them was a young man of some twenty-three years, whose character was beyond reproach. Also I found myself coming into quite an intimate friendship with a number of young men who carried themselves in a very commendable manner while in my presence. It was reported, however, that when they were out of my company they were quite ungentlemanly in their behavior.

As far as "the Boggs boys" were concerned, although I was frequently in their company, I could not see that I was any nearer to them or that I had any more influence over them than I had the first day I came to Kiddville. My two years' experience confirmed me in my belief that they were leaders of boys who were in the stress period. I thought that within another year if I did not succeed in coming in touch with "the Boggs boys" I might possibly get the other young people from under their influence.

At this time things took a very sudden turn with me. The evangelist had made my people restless, and some of them wanted a change. The gossips turned against me. It was commonly circulated that I had been drunk on fishing expeditions, and that I had gambled at shooting matches and horse races. Many of my former supporters began to treat me coolly, and some turned against me. It was reported that

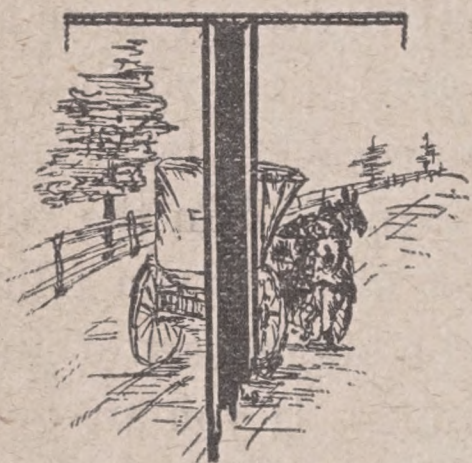
Deacon Bentley was seeking a chance to retaliate for the cutting speech I had made against him in the official board meeting. The officers of the church decided to take up my case, and I would have saved them this trouble by resigning my position if it had not been for Mrs. Atwood and Father Summers.

Dr. Quick attended the meeting of the officers. He said: "I've only got a minute to stop. I want to say my piece and then go and see a man down on Big Run. I hear you fellows are talking about letting the young preacher leave Kiddville. I never knew of a doctor being turned off in the midst of bad sickness that the patient did not die. If you fellows turn off this young preacher you'll be the biggest set of idiots that ever tampered with the Lord's doings. If you are going to let a set of gossiping old women and lazy, whisky guzzling loafers talk you out of your duty to your pastor you can just take your old church and go to Davy Jones with it. You'll never get another cent of my money. Then, picking up his medicine case, he left.



CHAPTER IX.

SIM BATES'S CLASS.



THE OPPOSITION soon revealed many friends unknown to me as friends. These persons were not slow in expressing themselves to the officers, who, in turn, decided that my services should be continued for another year. This, however, did not silence the gossips. I knew this could never be done till I gave them some topic that would divert their attention from me. This I resolved to do at the earliest date possible; but I never dreamed of getting such a topic before them as I did.

I saw, also, that it would be necessary to set Captain Two-coats, Lon Bass, Sim Bates and the others of their stripe before the people in their true characters. I saw no possible chance of turning the young men and boys into nobler ways of living until I had utterly destroyed the immoral influences of the persons I had named.

Besides, I had never been able to disassociate the name of Sim Bates with the tragic death of George Summers. I had never met Sim but what I thought, "Here is the man who could tell how George came to his death." When at the camp on Big Run I struck Sim, a voice seemed to say

to me: "You have struck the murderer of George Summers." I think a week never passed that I did not think of that boy's dying words: "Help get the boys out of Sim Bates's class." I never made an effort to help the boys of Kiddville that Father Summers did not second. But study as hard as I might, talk to whom I would, I could get no light on the death message.

One day as I was driving down the pike from Racketsburg I was startled with the thought: "It is three years to-day since I preached George Summers's funeral, and I know no more of Sim Bates's class than when I first heard of it." My horse was trotting along leisurely, and I was enwrapped in the mystery that so often made me do—what in the eyes of others were counted foolish things, and gave me the appellation of the 'absent-minded parson'—when I was disturbed by a footman crying, "Say, young man, are you goin' to Kiddville?"

"I am," I replied, reining up my horse. "Would you like to ride?"

"Don't care if I do," said the stranger, seating himself at my side. "Do you live at Kiddville?"

"I do."

"You must be a youngster that's growed up since I left."

"Perhaps. How long since you left?" I asked.

"Six years last fall. Beats creation how fast kids get to men; but you are not over eighteen, are you?"

"A little," I replied. I now knew he had taken me for a boy of the town, and I thought that if he was an old citizen I might get some pointers. I judged him to be somewhat tough, as I detected the smell of liquor on his breath.

"Anything new at Kiddville?" he continued.

"I believe not—well, yes, there is. Burglars broke into E. L. Stones's store last night."

"Don't say. Git anything much?"

"I could not say as to that, I left very early this morning."

"Got any ide' who the fellers was?"

"I think not—well, yes, I heard some one say that they thought it was home talent."

"Graduates from Sim Bates's class, I'll bet."

If he had shot me I would have been no more surprised.

"Sim Bates's class," I replied. "What is that?"

He gave me a searching glance and said: "Don't fool with your uncle, sonny. Don't tell me that you don't know what Sim Bates's class is."

"Well, I do not," I replied.

"I am a liar myself!" he said. "I'll bet your the biggest toad in the puddle; you can't fool your daddy."

"But, truly," I replied, "I know nothing about such a class. Tell me about it. I would like to join it."

"I'll bet you would!" and, drawing a flask from his pocket, he said: "Take some, won't you?"

"No, thank you!" I replied, pushing the flask away, "I have had enough for to-day."

"Been to town, eh?" Then he took a long pull at the flask and continued: "That's right, sonny. Be temperate is my sentiments. And you don't know anything about Sim Bates's class?" Well that's queer; but maybe he's quit teaching and

gone to preaching. He'd made a rattling success if he'd just let liquor alone. They used to meet out in the woods back of Joe Boggs's farm."

"What kind of a class was it? What did they do?" I asked.

"He called it an advanced class of all Sunday schools—a union affair—and had neither politics nor religion in it. It was made up of boys and young men who felt too big to attend Sunday school or meetin'. Bates would let a boy get to be about so big, and then he was after him. As regular as Sunday morning came he'd get the fellers together in the woods somewhere, if the weather was nice; if it was bad, they'd go to a barn, cow shed, or sugar house. They'd swear, drink, play cards, and listen to Sim preach. I have heard him say some as fine things as was ever got off in a Kiddville pulpit. The meetin' would last as long as they had any whisky or beer."

As he talked I sat and looked at him in perfect amazement. He said:

"You needn't look at me that way, young man. You've not seen all the world yet. Never will you see the inside of it. I know'd you was 'a greenie' as soon as I looked at you. Boys were not the only fellers in Sim's class. I have seen some of the high-toned church members there—Cap Two-coats among them."

I continued to draw him out till we came to the bridge at the north end of Kiddville, where he left me. I resolved to see Sim's class for myself, let it cost what it might. With the information I now had I was not long in locating the

class and its place of meeting. The following Lord's day I announced that there would be no preaching the next Lord's day because of important business elsewhere. I left Kiddville the following Thursday, ostensibly to see my father in western Illinois.

The following Lord's day was beautiful, and calculated to inspire a spirit of worship and praise. Sim Bates and his associates on that day found a half-drunken tramp with an empty and a well-filled whisky flask lying in the woods within about fifty yards of the place at which the class was to meet. With this tramp Sim struck up an acquaintance, and invited him to join his Sunday school class. The invitation was accepted somewhat reluctantly. The tramp said he had all the liquor he wanted, and that he never drank other people's liquor, and never let them drink his. Sim told him that he could drink his own whisky, but he would miss a load of fun, as they had a new scholar to initiate that day. It was by this means that the supposed tramp succeeded in getting through the day without drinking of their liquor, and, indeed, while he appeared to be drinking he did not touch a drop of spirits to his lips. When the class adjourned the tramp was left in the woods drunk, as was supposed.

I had fully expected to see some very disgraceful things, but none such as I witnessed. Bad as it was, I determined to publish the affair just as I had witnessed it. There was in the town of Racketsburg a consecrated Christian editor, in whom I had great confidence. I told him what I had done and seen, and I solemnly promised him that if he would publish my expose of Sim Bates's class I would, if necessary, take all the consequences in case the author's name was demanded by the courts.

CHAPTER X.

"THE EXPOSE."



in store for them.

"You fellows will wake up when you see the Racketsburg Trumpet," said the driver.

"Why?" drawled Lon Bass. "What's the talk 'bout Racketsburg now?"

"'Tain't 'bout the burg; it's all 'bout Kiddville."

"What's the trouble with Kiddville?" asked another.

"Trouble enough! The devil 'll be to pay if the Trumpet tells the truth," was the reply.

"Sensation? Scandal? Or what?" queried Captain Two-coats.

"You'll think sensation when you read it. Get your papers and see for yourself," said Ol, as he drove away.

When the mail was distributed a rush was made for the papers. The captain was the first served. The following headlines met his eyes:

KIDDVILLE SCANDAL!

THE SHAMEFUL PROCEEDINGS

OF

SIM BATES'S CLASS,

AS

WITNESSED AND EXPOSED

BY

A MAN UP A TREE.

"Great heavens, fellows!" he said. "Listen to this!" Then backing up against the counter, he read:

"For a number of years it has been known that some subtle, yet mighty force, was neutralizing the efforts of the most moral and religious people of Kiddville. While there are no dram shops in the village, strong drink, by some means, finds its way to the boys and young men of the community as well as to the toppers. The inability of the Christian workers to win and hold boys in the Sunday school and churches has been deplored by all good people. Thus far no one has been able to tell just what the hindrance is, but it is most certainly revealed by our correspondent, who signs himself 'A Man Up a Tree.' While his communication discloses deeds so shameful that they appear impossible, yet our informant is a man who occupies a high position in society, and he is in every way responsible. He not only expresses a willingness, but also an eagerness, to meet in the courts of justice the parties whom he names, if they will have it so. We admit the letter to our columns because we believe that the moral

safety of the boys of Kiddville and vicinity will be preserved thereby.—Editor.

“The Christian parents of Kiddville might justly be charged with inexcusable—if not criminal—blindness to the perils that surround their sons and daughters. Last Lord’s day morning as Christian fathers and mothers sat in their respective churches worshiping God and praying His richest benedictions to rest upon them and theirs, the devil, incarcerated in the whisky-soaked skins of one of Kiddville’s toppers and his helpers, was making ample provisions to prevent the answer to these prayers.

“In Elder Brokman’s pasture that lies along Little Run, just south of Kiddville, there is a thickly wooded plot of about three acres that is elevated above the stream some twenty or thirty feet. Being located far from the public road, and also surrounded by thick undergrowth, this spot of ground makes a splendid hiding place for the devil and his colaborers.

“Last Lord’s day morning, as the church bells were calling young and old, rich and poor, saint and sinner, to the sacred and inspiring associations to be found in the communion of saints, Sim Bates, accompanied by his right and left hand supporters, Captain Twocoats and Lon Bass, strolled down the creek, crossed the pasture, and were soon in this thicket, where they had secreted two kegs of beer and a two-gallon jug of whisky.

“No sooner had they reached this place than they proceeded to open their Bibles, as they called the kegs of beer, and enjoy what the captain called ‘an inflow of the spirit.’

The following bit of conversation throws light upon the purpose of their coming to this particular place:

“‘Sim, I guess your Sunday school class is going to be small to-day,’ said Lon Bass.

“‘You will have to offer some kind of prize for new scholars,’ interposed the captain, ‘or Atwood will knock you out as bad on Sunday school as he did down on Big Run.’

“‘No he’ll not,’ replied Sim. ‘I’ve got the bulge on him to-day. I’ve got a new scholar comin’, one of the parson’s lambs.’

“‘I bet a keg of beer its not a Boggs boy,’ laughed Lon.

“‘You’re right there. I don’t want any of them in my class. As long as they cuss the preacher as they do, and everybody thinks them the meanest devils around, they make splendid scapegoats.’

“‘Who is your new scholar?’

“‘The old elder’s boy,’ replied Sim, with a hearty laugh.

“‘Holy Moses!’ ejaculated the captain. ‘He is the best young fellow in Kiddville. Everybody banks on him as a young saint. He is held up as an example for everybody.’

“‘They won’t hold him up any more,’ said Sim, again giving a fiendish laugh. ‘They’ve got to be very good if I can’t get them some way.’

“By this time other persons put in an appearance. Soon a crowd of about twenty-five persons sat around the beer kegs. In the number were boys as young as fourteen years. They all smoked, drank, played cards and engaged in telling obscene stories. Often these tales took on a personality that defamed the character of some of the most virtuous wives and

daughters in Kiddville. The boldness with which young boys spoke of their shameful affiliations showed how rapidly they were learning in Sim Bates's class.

"In the course of time 'the elder's boy,' accompanied by Bill Pegg, entered the ring. Evidently this was the young man's first departure from the path of rectitude. He soon became clay in the potter's hand. The beer loosened his tongue and drove away all sense of shame. His efforts to be tough were very laughable to the more advanced in Sim Bates's class. They mocked him and asked him which he liked the better—the liquor they gave him or that he received from the old man in the meetin' house. The vileness of the conversation that accompanied the drinking was only surpassed by the debauch of which we cannot write.

"The parties departed as they had arrived, singly or in small companies, just as it pleased. Some remained till darkness covered the peaceful village of Kiddville. The day's work was done. One happy Christian home had been invaded. The fruitage of the day's sowing no mortal can tell. Some of the leaders of this diabolic school pose as honorable citizens of our glorious Nation. Sad as it may appear, some of them were once patriots, whose love of country was only equaled by the heroism that sustained them on battlefields and in prison pens. Chief among these is the captain, who never loses an opportunity to flaunt his army service before the people. By becoming a chief actor in the scene described above he not only forfeits the honor, confidence and protection of the nation he once served, but he places an odium upon those true heroes who should have the honors of a grate-

ful nation. Surely, in the eyes of an intelligent public, the leaders in such deeds of shame can only be looked upon as enemies of the temporal peace, moral heart, and sacred honor of our boys and young men, if not traitors to the nation on which they are pensioners.

"But this is not all—many of our citizens will call to mind the tragic death of one our boys, which occurred some two years ago. This boy's dying words were: 'Get the boys out of Sim Bates's class.' May it not be possible that Sim Bates and his supporters are in some way responsible for the untimely death of that innocent? It appears so to

"A Man Up a Tree."

"By the eternal!" said Captain Twocoats, when he had finished reading. "The party who wrote that article will get cold lead as sure as I find out who he is."

Many bystanders turned deathly pale when they heard his oath. They feared the consequences. Twice before he had made like threats and had not hesitated to put them into execution. The people became intensely excited. The captain at once rode to Racketsburg and interviewed the editor, who was very calm, and said he would only disclose the name of the informant when he was legally forced to do so.

The editor having served in the same regiment with the captain, and also being bound by political and fraternal ties to him, found the angry man more considerate than he would have been to another person not so bound to him. The captain left the editor's office declaring that if he could not find the party by any other means he would by law force the editor to give the contributors name.

Saturday noon following I returned to Kiddville and found the community in a state of intense excitement. Mrs. Atwood told me many things that had been said. She believed that Sim Bates's class had been destroyed, and that Captain Twocoats would be perfectly understood thereafter.

About 3 o'clock as I walked down the street I discovered a barber had opened a shop in a little building that had once been used as a doctor's office. Stepping in, I was greatly surprised to find that the proprietor was the party who had told me about "Sim Bates's class." He was alone, and I threw myself in the chair, supposing he did not recognize me. He gave me a brief history of himself, and told me that his name was Tom Secor, and that he was a distant relative of Mrs. Twocoats. When he had completed his work and I arose to pay him, he said: "I made a fearful break on you, Parson."

"How was that?"

"By taking you to be a youngster, when you were a full-fledged parson. I've been kickin' myself for it ever since."

I stood looking at him in perfect amazement, not knowing what to say.

"Don't you know me?" he continued. "Don't you remember overtaking me on your way from Racketsburg, and my offerin' you whisky and tellin' you all about Sim Bates's class?"

"You puzzle me," I said, finding my tongue at last.

"Oh! it's all right," he went on. "I am awful glad I gave you a pointer. My! but you hit 'em hard. They've been layin' 'round on the street about six deep for the last three days. Say, Parson," he continued, with a smile, "you're not half the fool you look to be."

I was perfectly astounded. He was a man that knew enough to do me great harm. He could force me to disclose myself—for I had determined to speak the truth, let consequences be what they might.

“Oh! go on about your business,” he said, at last. “I’ll never give you away. I’m done with that kind of business. I’m goin’ to begin a Christian life some day. I’ll see you tomorrow. I’m comin’ to hear you preach.”

I left him, believing the best thing I could do was to take him at his word, and fearlessly face future developments. If I bound him to secrecy he might conclude that I was afraid, and so, losing confidence in my manliness, tell all he knew.

In front of the postoffice I met a number of men, and began to shake hands with them. When I reached my hand to Captain Twocoats he struck it away, saying: “Don’t reach your fist out to me unless you are prepared to defend yourself.”

“Why, Captain!” I said, “what is the trouble?”

“Trouble enough!” he roared. “I’ll never take your hand again till you tell me whether you wrote that article in the Trumpet or not.”

“What article?” I asked. “I have been away for nearly two weeks,” and I started to pass him. He placed his hand upon me and gave me a push that came near causing me to lose my feet, as he shouted:

“You don’t get away from here till I say so.”

“Captain!” I said, looking him squarely in the eye, “I will not take such treatment from any—”

"You'll not, eh? I have a mind to blow your brains out without another word. Being its you, I'll mash your—" and he made a dash at me; but before I could move an arm a fist flashed before my eyes, and the next instant he was lying on the ground. He made an effort to draw his revolver, when Edwin Boggs, standing over him, said: "Move if you dare, and you've told the last lie about 'the Boggs boys!'"

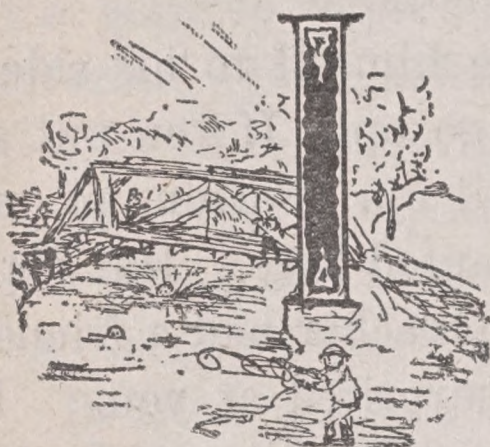
"Here, here!" said Dr. Quick, forcing himself to his side. "Sonnie, put that thing up. It might go up. If you put a hole in Cap's hide I'll just have to sew it up. Parson, go on about your business. No prayers are wanted here. Ha! Ha! Cap, your nose is blooming sure. The preacher had a friend you wasn't counting on, eh? I am surprised at you. I thought you was too good a soldier to fight till you knew where your enemy was stationed. You'll learn something yet if you don't die too soon."

I took the doctor's advice and left, not knowing what was before me. Near my gate, in the dusk that evening, I heard Shortie Boggs say to Edwin as they passed: "I wouldn't have risked my life for him. He could have fought his way out or taken a licking."

"He'll get a chance to do his own fighting yet," replied Edwin. "Twocoats will never rest till he gets his hand on him."

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE A RANSOM.



NOW FELT sure that I had won the friendship of Edwin Boggs. But he was younger than his three brothers, and so long as Shortie, the leader of the leaders, stood out against me I could only expect "rough riding." The following day I entered the pulpit with no small amount of anxiety as to what the week would bring forth. The audience was unusually large, and near the center of the house I saw the barber, Tom Secor. At the close of the sermon Elder Freeman took charge of the communion service. He was just lifting the linen from the table when his son Morris, coming forward and placing his hand upon his father's shoulder, said: "Father, be seated a moment. I wish to make a statement." Every eye was turned upon the young man, who never before had attempted to speak in public. Every heart was filled with wonder and expectancy as he, with remarkable calmness and self-possession, said: "You have all read the article in the Racketsburg Trumpet this week. It not only exposed the behavior of certain men of this town, but it cast a shadow upon the character of an elder's son. Now, there are three elders in this church, and each one has one or more sons. These boys cannot all be

guilty, but they must all share in the reproach which should justly rest upon but one person. I know not, neither do I wish to know, the person who wrote that article, but I do think he should have given the name of the young man against whom he makes such a charge. I do not wish to be held responsible for another man's misdoing; neither do I intend that any boy or young man in this community shall be reproached for my sins. I am the young man to whom the writer referred. Not only am I guilty, but I stand ready to testify to the truthfulness of every word in that article."

The old elder's face turned ghastly pale, and he looked for a moment as though he would fall to the floor.

"I deeply regret," continued the speaker, without taking his eye off of the audience, "to bring this shame upon my Christian father and mother. They are in no manner to blame for my sin, though they must suffer from it. I make my confession more public than I have made my offense, because I would open the eyes of parents to the awful temptations set before their children. This is the first time I have ever gone astray, and, by the grace of God, it shall be the last. I most sincerely beg forgiveness of my friends, my brethren and my Savior."

"My most noble son," said the father, as he threw his arms about the young man and kissed him. "We forgive you, for you have this day shown a greater heroism than is ever witnessed on battlefields. It is a heroism that is only surpassed by that shown by our adorable Lord when He gave His life a ransom for ours." Then, lifting the loaf before the people, the elder said: "As often as ye do eat bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come."

In the depth of contrition we all sat and communed with our Lord as the emblems of His broken body and shed blood passed through the audience. I had been most prayerfully watching and longing for a time when I could conduct a series of meetings. Believing that the time appointed had come, before dismissing the audience I announced my intention to begin at once such a meeting. This announcement met with the hasty approval of all the members of the church. In the three years that I had been in Kiddville I had not neglected my study and preparation of special sermons to be used when I should reach the point when I could teach those whom I had sought to win.

That evening I placed back of the pulpit a large oil painting, on which I had expended much time and money, and for which my devoted wife and innocent baby had sacrificed many conveniences that they might justly have claimed at my hands.

I called the painting "The Arch of Life." It presented a landscape somewhat mountainous, divided into two parts by a stream, which arose far to the left, its course being outlined by the dim, distant, mountain ranges. This stream revealed itself in the nearer mountains, passed through a wide valley, then in a raging torrent swept across the foreground into an abyss below. This "River of Sin," as I named it, in the foreground, was bridged by a massive arch, which I called "The Arch of Life," and which gave to the entire painting its name. This arch was composed of seven huge stones, the center one, being a keystone, bound the whole structure together. These seven stones represented the classification of the books of the

Bible. On each stone were engraved emblems showing the purpose and office of that particular book or class of books.

Far to the left, above the dim and distant outline of mountains, there was a star—"The Star of Prophecy," which shed its light upon paths that led the way to "The Arch of Life." Also, on the left, could be seen lofty mountain peaks, from whose summits seers, catching visions of the coming events, foretold them to the people of their generation. In the valley on the left of the stream were the Jewish tabernacle and camp. On the keystone and in the center of the path crossing the arch was the cross. From the cross and the arch a path led the way to the valley on the right of the stream. This was the path of righteousness, which ended the glory-crowned mountains of life, to be seen in the extreme right of the painting. Above these mountains appeared the city of God—the New Jerusalem—coming down from God out of the heavens.

Down on the right of the "River of Sin" could be seen persons receiving the perishing. I had so constructed the drawing that there was not a single object in it that did not sustain some vital relation to Jesus and his mission in the world. My purpose was to gain an entrance through the eye into the minds of the most thoughtless, and to give them a mental vision and an intelligent understanding of the Plan of Salvation.

I had not planned in vain. My audiences became so large that many could not get into the house. The young people gave the most profound attention to my discourses. Before and after the sermons groups of people—sitting in the pews

or standing by the painting with open Bibles—would discuss some newly discovered object and its meaning.

In these little groups that lingered after the sermon might often be seen baby Grace, now past five years old. She was a favorite with the people, and an unceasing talker. Again and again while I was planning and studying the painting she had plied me with questions innumerable. Two ideas had become very deeply impressed upon her mind. First, that everything except the stream had some reference to Jesus. Second, that Jesus especially loved the people who were trying to get others out of the river.

For three weeks my meeting continued with ever-increasing interest; a tidal wave of Bible reading and study swept over the community. But as yet there had not been a single conversion. I now began to fear that after all my work was going to fail. I was a young man, and the strain of the meeting was beginning to tell on my physical strength. One evening Dr. Quick said to me: "Parson, if you don't let up a little your wife will get a chance to marry another man."

"Not while I'm living," I replied with a smile.

"But you won't be living," he said. "Haven't you got a bit of common sense? At this rate you will kill yourself before you know it. If you would take care of yourself you might do some good in the world—that is, if you live long enough."

I felt that back of his jesting there was a true word of warning that I ought to heed. That night I said to my father (who had come to spend a few weeks visiting me and to "see the rounding up of the stampede," as he said):

"Father, what is wrong with this meeting? Why do not the people obey the gospel?"

"Don't you know?" he asked.

"Indeed I do not," I replied.

"Then I will tell you. You are missing the mark by shooting too high. You are filling the people with a knowledge of God's work. There will be some young preachers come out of this meeting if you manage it right. But the time has come when you must lower your sight and strike the heart instead of the head. Try it awhile, and see if I am not right."

The next morning I resolved to follow my father's advice. I spent the entire forenoon at my table preparing a sermon. About noon a heavy rain set in, which continued the whole afternoon and the greater part of the night. The meeting house was not opened that evening. By 10 o'clock the next morning Little Run had risen above the high water mark. Taking Grace, father and I went down to see the flood. We walked to the center of the iron bridge, which was lined with people, old and young. While we were watching the raging torrent that was sweeping by Dr. Quick drove onto the bridge and stopped to talk. "Well, Parson," he said, "this flood was a blessing. It gave the people a rest. You are looking better for it. It is well enough you stopped and cooled off a little, for if you had not you'd a-busted a flue in a thousand dollar mule." Then he started one of his boisterous laughs, but was stopped by the screams of the people.

"Great heavens!" he cried, "whose child was that?" I turned only in time to see the form of a man plunge into the flood. Some one rushing to me cried, "Parson, Grace has

fallen in." I staggered and perhaps would have fallen had it not been for my father supporting me. I was aroused by another shout from the people. Then I saw a man arise to the surface of the raging waters, and Grace was in his arms. Fighting with the flood, he placed her arm about his neck. Then he began to swim. The current was rapidly bearing him down the stream; logs, rails, stumps and tree tops were leaping, twisting and turning in every conceivable way. The doctor called for me to get into his buggy, and soon we were dashing down the stream to a point where we saw the rescuer would probably land. We reached the shore just as he was nearing. I leaped from the buggy and rushed into the stream to help him, when his feet struck the ground. Arising, he gave the child into my arms. I was so rejoiced that I did not notice to whom I was indebted for the life of my child until she said: "Jesus loves Shortie Boggs, don't He, papa?"

I grasped his hand and tried to tell him how unbounded was my gratitude. I must have made an awful out of it, for he looked at me very strangely as he said:

"That's all right, Parson. It's nothing, it's nothing. Mrs. Atwood saved Freddie's life."

When I turned to speak to Dr. Quick I saw him driving over the bridge at a rate that would have put Jehu to shame.

Great crowds of people came to meet us. Everybody was praising Shortie Boggs for his heroism.

When we reached home I found Dr. Quick in the house talking with Mrs. Atwood. As we entered he said: "If I hadn't put Dexter down to his best a lot of fools would have rushed in here and scared the life out of your wife."

I thanked him, and he left me, saying: "I'll just take ten dollars off my church subscription."

When evening came the church was again filled with people. I took as my theme, "Life a Ransom." Considered from a homiletic standpoint, the sermon was a failure. But as Brother Wyatt's sweet voice led off in the invitation hymn,

"I gave my life for thee,"

I saw that his heart had been touched by the wooings of divine love. My heart gave a leap of joy as a young man came walking down the aisle and gave me his hand. It was Shortie Boggs. He had learned that day what it was to give his life a ransom. He was quickly followed by his three brothers.

A happy procession of people in the beautiful moonlight marched from the church to Little Run. The waters were still angry, and their loud roaring, mingling with the voices of the singer, gave forth a melody that will never be forgotten by those who heard it. Just below the bridge, near where he had cast his life away for another, I buried Shortie Boggs and his brothers with their Lord. As he came forth from that emblematic grave the people sang:

"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Nor defend his cause;
Maintain the honor of his word,
The glory of his cross."

Baby Grace whispered to her mamma:

"Shortie loves Jesus now, don't he, mamma?"

The meeting lasted three weeks longer. Among the seventy people that connected themselves with the church there

were two score young men and boys. Joseph Boggs and wife being numbered with their sons, gave a quitclaim title to the church lot and the burying ground.

Having corralled the "Kids of Kiddville," I laid aside the garb of cowboy and entered upon my duties as pastor of the church. * * *

One evening two years later as I sat in my open door and baby Grace was plying me with questions, I heard a man weeping in the cemetery. I looked across and saw an old man kneeling at a grave weeping pitiously. By his side his companion was striving to comfort him. I walked over to them. They were Father and Mother Summers. Their heads were uncovered, and the setting sun covered them with a sheen of silvery glory.

I knelt by the old man and said: "Does your sorrow become no less with the flight of years?"

"No less!" he said. "It might be lighter if I only knew how he came to die."

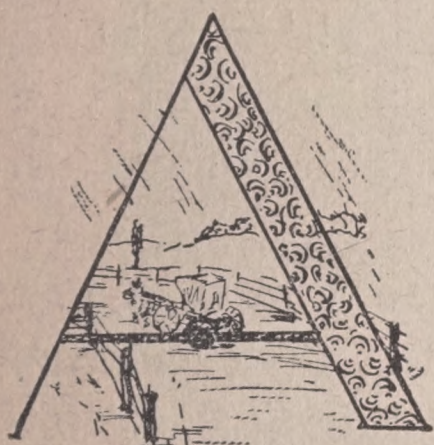
"Father," I said, "some day this mystery will be solved."

And it was solved much sooner than I expected, and in a manner of which I had never dreamed.



CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.



SUDDEN change in the course of the lives of so many young men and boys of Kiddville not only became an occasion of great rejoicing, but also of great anxiety on the part of the older members of the church. "Better," said some, "that the boys had never started right than that they should start and then go wrong."

Many persons prophesied that within six months "the Boggs boys" would be up to worse meanness than ever before. I made a note of all these prophets of evil, knowing that they would seek the fulfillment of their own prophecy.

I recognized the fact that the duties of a pastor were in many respects quite different from those of a cowboy. First it would be my duty to lead the flock to new fields and fountains; second, I must see that another stampede did not occur; third, I must prevent the ravages of wild beasts and the spread of disease.

I also recognized the fact that I was dealing with young people who were not thinking of going to heaven right away, but who were planning to abide in this sin-cursed world a number of years longer. That many of these young people

were fully fifty per cent. fun, I could not deny, and that a game of baseball or a fishing expedition would be more likely to catch them than would a prayer meeting, I could not call in question. I also knew that joining Christ's Kingdom was not getting up a baseball club or a fishing party. I felt, however, that Christ wished these young people to live as young people, not as old ones. I believe that Christ wished the boys to be Christians as boys, and not as grandfathers. I could see no reason why a boy that had come into Christ's Kingdom should cease to live a boy's life.

These boys and young men were very happy in their new life. This happiness I knew was the result of their choosing the right, and striving to do the straight thing. Knowing that boys, like men, would drift from the church as soon as they ceased to be happy in it, I set about doing those things that would keep them happy.

Knowing that a boy must be active and not passive in the great work of character building, I kept close counsel with the senior members of the church, and we sought to have something for each one to do. We never lost sight of the entertaining. Even Deacon Bentley found that my suggestion concerning marble playing could be put to good use.

Dr. Quick said that Christ's Kingdom was a kingdom of brothers, and he saluted every boy and young man whom he met as a brother. He soon had a class of young men meeting in his office on Wednesday evening. He taught them such things as he felt that they should know in order to live pure and healthy lives, and to make themselves useful and helpful to others. These classes were often attended by fathers, who

were loud in their praises of the doctor and his work. Many of these young men took a deep interest in the study of medicine, and when I asked the doctor if he was not afraid they would become physicians and starve him out, he replied:

“Not a bit of it. The business of ‘The Quack’ is to get a man down and then keep him down, as long as he has any money; but the business of the Christian physician is to keep a man up while he is up. If a young man is going to live a happy Christian life, he must learn how to keep well. He must strengthen the life line, not cut it.”

Mrs. Atwood organized a number of young ladies and mothers into a class called “The Keepers of Home.” This class met every Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Atwood said she could never see why Christian women should not be the cleanest and every way the best housekeepers in the world. She believed a well-kept home, a home kept in the interest of those who ought to live in it, would be a great power in making the boys and young men noble. Hence, she taught kindness and cheerfulness in the home life. Young wives were taught to love their husbands, and to recognize their love of the beautiful. The effects of these lessons were commented on by husbands and brothers, who, returning home from labor found the old wash dress thrown aside, and the wife, mother or sister, as the case might be, neatly attired in a clean dress, and clothed in her right mind. As a consequence, husbands and brothers, after evening work, took time “to clean up a little,” as they called it; this, in turn, led to reading and happy conversation.

Doctor Quick frequently delivered lectures to this class, on

caring for the sick, and thus taught these sisters and mothers to look upon good health as an essential to Christian living. They were all very happy in their work, and soon became useful, not only in hours of health, but in times of sickness.

It may appear strange to some, but we did not have a young people's prayer meeting. So long as the old people were friends and companions of the young we saw no reason why the young would not be as prayerful in the presence as well as in the absence of their seniors. Our purpose was to unite young and old in the service of Christ. It never occurred to us that there would be a children's department or young people's quarters in heaven. Paul and Timothy were bosom friends, yet when they first met one was a man of years—bent under the care of the churches and the infirmity of his body; while the other was a bright boy of about seventeen years, full of light and happiness. This spirit of Paul's companionship for the young soon found its way to the hearts of Kiddville's fathers and mothers.

Father Summers led us all in showing friendship for the boys and young men. We sat at his feet and learned of him. He and his good companion threw their hearts and their home open to the young boys. He loved them, and did not hesitate to tell them so. To have seen this bereaved father and mother in company with these young people one would never have known that they carried a sorrow so great that oftentimes when alone they were prostrated under it. Every Lord's day morning he was seen standing at the door of the church giving a most cheerful welcome to all who entered.

For five years more I continued my duties as pastor of the

Kiddville Church; and "The Crown of my rejoicing" was the presence of young men and boys at all the church services. One afternoon, during my fifth year at Kiddville, I was sitting on Doctor Quick's porch talking with him about a number of young men who were to leave our community for the purpose of attending college. Suddenly a young man came riding up to the gate and cried out:

"Doctor, a steam engine has exploded on Lee Burton's farm, and Sim Bates is badly hurt. They want you to come at once, and to bring the parson with you."

"Well!" exclaimed the doctor, "he must think he is going to die if he wants the parson."

We were soon in the buggy, and Dexter went dashing through the town at breakneck speed. It was the first ride of the kind I had ever taken with Doctor Quick. I thought sometimes I would be thrown out against the fence. On we went, heedless of all obstructions. The farther we went the faster we appeared to go. The doctor never spoke a word all through the ride. His face, as I could get a glance at it, was a study.

When we reached Lee Burton's farm there was great excitement. The doctor was as cool as if going to his morning meal. I accompanied him into a room where lay Sim Bates, his face as pale as death. As soon as he saw me he began to curse me, and ordered me out of the room. I turned aside without a word.

The doctor made a careful examination of the injured man, and then said:

"Well, Sim, what do you want me to do for you?"

"I want you to pull me through, of course."

"Sorry, Sim, but I can do you no good. You have taught your last Sunday-school class and downed your last glass of grog. If you are going to do any repenting you had better be at it."

"I'm not going to die, am I?" asked Sim, his whole frame quaking at the thought.

"That's what you are going to do. And you are not going to be long about it."

For a moment he lay in silence, then turning to the doctor he said:

"Doc, get everybody out of the room and bring in the parson."

The room was cleared, and as I entered the door was closed after me. A more pitiable picture I never saw. I advanced and, gently placing my hand on his, said, "I am very sorry for you. What do you want me to do for you?"

"Nothing!" he replied. "Parson, you're too much for me. I can't hold out against you any longer. You broke up my class. I thought I'd get the better of you yet, but I can't now. You ought to know it, so I'll tell you. I'm to blame for George Summer's death!"

I drew back from the dying man and faced him in silence. He was so overcome with his own confession that for a moment he was silent. Then he said:

"George was a good boy and I had been trying to get hold of him. He kept trying to keep boys in the Sunday-school, and had followed some fellows out into Boggs's woods pasture. We caught and tied him, and took him up to the

place where the class met; but he would not drink. When we saw the Boggs's calves we hitched them up to a sled, and was just having some fun hauling George around. The calves got scared at some dogs and run away. We tried to stop them, but could not. You know the rest."

Then he became silent, and the doctor said, "Sim, you have not told it all. Who was with you? Who was the other boy?"

He was growing very weak, and turning his face to the doctor said: "We took a solemn oath never to tell on each other."

"But you are dying," said the doctor. "You should tell it all."

"No," he said, "I'll never tell on the others."

"Then," said the physician, "you should repent. Don't die keeping this secret."

"There's George now!" said Sim, a look of horror coming into his face. "That day!—Don't. George, don't come near. Leave me!—Go off!—Go off! George Summers, leave me, I say!"

He made an effort to rise, then his head fell back upon the pillow and he died as he lived—a polluter of boys.

The community was wild with talk for weeks; then, as before, it quieted down, and the mystery was not wholly solved. Sim Bates and his class were dead, as far as their influence over Kiddville boys was concerned.

* * * *

That was a quarter of a century ago. The boys and girls of that day are active men and women now, each one striving

MAY 18 1899

to be faithful citizens of Christ's Kingdom. Lon Secor and the elder's son are active members in one of the leading churches in a capitol city. Shortie Boggs is a missionary in India. Edwin lives where Doctor Quick lived, the doctor having long ago gone to his reward. I am no longer pastor of the Kiddville Church, but Freddie Boggs lives in the parsonage, and baby Grace stands where the "Palm Tree" stood.



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